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The
First Theological Seminary
and Ours

by
S. A. CARTLEDGE

Final Days of Endowment Campaign

THE FIRST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY AND OURS

*An Address delivered by Dr. S. A. Cartledge, Professor of
New Testament Language and Exegesis at the opening
of Columbia Theological Seminary, September 11, 1945.*

TODAY we are beginning the first session of Columbia Theological Seminary in the new era of peace. The closing moments of the war drove home to us in unmistakable terms the fact that we are living in a new era—an era filled with tremendous possibilities for good or for the very annihilation of civilization. Voices from all quarters are hurling their challenge to religion. Typical of these is that of General MacArthur at the time of the surrender of Japan: "Military alliances, balances of power, leagues of nations all in turn failed, leaving the only path to be by way of the crucible of war. The utter destructiveness of war now blots out this alternative. We have had our last chance. If we do not now devise some greater and more equitable system Armageddon will be at our door. The problem basically is theological and involves a spiritual recrudescence and improvement of human character that will synchronize with our almost matchless advance in science, art, literature and all material and cultural developments of the past 2,000 years. It must be of the spirit if we are to save the flesh."

Some of us have believed all along that the basic problems of all life are spiritual and that the religion of Jesus Christ has the only true answer to those problems. It is encouraging to see men from walks of life that have often ignored or even opposed religion being forced to that same conclusion. Will we in the Church be able to bring our Christianity to bear on modern civilization in time to keep it from committing suicide? Surely the ministry of the Church has never had such an opportunity and such an overwhelming responsibility as it has today. In such an atmosphere as this Columbia Seminary is opening its doors again. Students and faculty alike must determine to do their very best to live up to the challenge of the hour. How can we do that?

Over nineteen hundred years ago the first Christian Theological Seminary began its work. That was the ideal seminary. Let us look at some of its distinctive characteristics, that we may have them clearly before ourselves as we begin our seminary year today.

We read in the Revised Version of Mark 3: 14: "And he appointed twelve, that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach." This is the record of the founding of our first Christian Theological Seminary and a brief survey of its methods and aims.

First let us look at the student body. They were twelve chosen men. There were many others who admired Jesus and were real disciples of His, but from this much larger group Jesus chose just these twelve men that He might give them the benefit of the long, intensive training and fit them for the places of leadership in the Church. We must not make the mistake of minimizing the importance of the laymen in the Church, but we can truthfully say that the ministers occupy the place of supreme importance, second only to that of the great Head of the Church Himself. You men who make up the student body today are likewise chosen men, men who have heard the call of God, men who have been set apart as candidates for the ministry by the Church.

Why did Jesus choose just those twelve men? Were they the most brilliant men intellectually? Were their personalities the most charming that could be found? Were their characters perfect? An emphatic no must be given to every one of those questions. Jesus chose them for their potentialities rather than for their actualities. If they had already attained perfection there would have been no need for them to have entered that Seminary at all.

The personalities of those twelve men had to receive a tremendous amount of development before Jesus could allow them to graduate and go out into the work. The hot-headed sons of thunder had a long way to go before they could become the disciples of love. The rough edges had to be carefully taken off the rugged Galilean fishermen. Egotistical pride had to be rooted out from the lives of all of them. Tact and consideration for others had to be developed.

These twelve men were ignorant of many of the very fundamental truths of the religion that they were to preach, though oftentimes they did not even realize that they were ignorant. How much they needed to learn.

Surely all of them needed to grow spiritually. The Gospel record is dotted here and there with their sins of omission and of commission.

No, these were not perfect men, men who had already attained. But they were men who had expressed a deep, abiding love for Jesus Christ, men who had been willing to leave all and follow Him, men who were willing to give all of their lives to His service.

Jesus chose these twelve men for a two-fold purpose: "... that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach." Those men were to have the inestimable privilege of spending some three years in intimate fellowship with Jesus, learning from Him. But that was not to be an end in itself; that was to fit them to go forth and preach His Gospel.

The first Theological Seminary had a faculty of only one, but what a faculty that was! No matter how large we may make our faculties or how many learned degrees they may be able to exhibit, we can never hope to match that first perfect faculty. Jesus is no longer here in the flesh; He can no longer gather theological students around Himself in person. Those of us who have the grave responsibility of carrying on that work for Him today are all too conscious of our own limitations. We must strive as earnestly as possible to be as much like Him as we can. And we must use all the means at our disposal to help our students be just as close to the glorified, risen Jesus as we possibly can.

Jesus is not here in person now, but in the written Word of God we have four inspired portraits of Him. Through them we can come to know Jesus well. We can learn much of His matchless teachings. We can more and more catch His spirit, until we can say in humble truth with the Apostle Paul, "Christ liveth in me."

How did Jesus go about His work as teacher in that first Theological Seminary?

For one thing, He spent much time teaching His pupils the true meaning of the Word of God. His Bible was, of course, our Old Testament; our seminaries today must add the New Testament. Jesus treated His Bible as the Word of God; without question it was His "infallible rule of faith and practice." He used it when He met Satan's temptations. He used it in His arguments with His opponents. He used it for the instruction of His students. He used it for the comfort of His own Soul, even when He was hanging upon the cross. He made the Word

of God central in the curriculum of the first Theological Seminary; we today make no apology to anyone for keeping the Word of God in that place of central importance.

We may notice in passing that Jesus was not bound to accept all of the ancient interpretations of Scripture, however. The Word is eternally true, but our human understanding of it is sometimes far from perfect. Read the latter part of the fifth of Matthew, for example, and see Jesus calling the traditional interpretation of His day, at times inadequate, at times even false. We today should have a high respect for the opinions of the grand heroes of the Church, but we must not make the mistake of giving to them the infallibility that belongs truly only to Scripture itself. The interpretation of Scripture still challenges the very best thought that we have to bring to it. Day by day we may learn more of its truth and may learn how to apply it more truly to the changing conditions of every new age.

Thus we today follow Jesus in putting the department of Biblical Theology in a place of supreme importance in our theological curriculum. We use the original languages to get as close as possible to the original meaning and force. We study textual criticism in order that we may have a highly trustworthy text with which to work. We get all the help we can from historical criticism, archæology, commentaries, lexicons, encyclopedias, and all the rest of our rather complex equipment. But we do all of this that we may know more truly the Word of God itself and hear it speaking to the needs of our day.

Jesus did not give as prominent a place to the department of Systematic Theology as we do today, probably, yet He recognized the tremendous importance of right thinking about God. He would have no sympathy with those who say that creed and belief are of no importance. The form of systematics is more Greek than Hebrew, and we today feel the need of the systematic organization of our thoughts. We get our thoughts, though, from exactly the same source as Jesus did, God's revelation to us in His written Word and in the Word Incarnate. True theology comes from God to man; it is a divine revelation, not a human invention.

Jesus gave considerable prominence to His department of Historical Theology. He Himself knew well the record of God's dealings with His Chosen People down through the centuries. He could use the failures of the ancient Jews to warn His students against making the same kinds of mistakes. He could use their successes to inspire them to like accomplishments. He knew how to read the many lessons from history, and He sought to give His students that same ability.

Jesus likewise gave much emphasis to the various matters that we group together in the department of Practical Theology. What a matchless course they had in pastoral theology, as they saw the Great Shepherd of the sheep tenderly caring for His flock and heard Him discuss the various problems that they would face. What a course in homiletics they had as they had the privilege of sitting at the feet of One who could preach a Sermon on the Mount! How much they must have learned about religious education as they saw the Master Teacher tenderly take the little ones in His arms, as they heard Him teaching the great eternal truths with His matchless parables!

We believe that we have made our curriculum today remarkably like that of the first Theological Seminary—and we do not believe that that can be improved upon.

And Jesus did all of this for the specific purpose of fitting them to go forth and preach. Every part of our seminary work should be just as practical today.

The student himself may not be able to see the direct bearing at the time, but he must trust the wisdom of those who have the responsibility of shaping the courses. The work of every class every day should fit the student to be a more effective preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

That first theological course seems to have lasted about three years, just as our seminary course does today. Such important matters cannot be taught overnight; there is no short cut to them. Those years of preparation were the most important years in the lives of those first students. How tragic it is when a student today thinks that he is wasting time in school, that he will only begin to be useful when he finishes his formal education.

Jesus recognized the importance of mixing the practical with the theoretical.

He gave His students work to do from time to time. Twice He sent them forth from Himself, the twelve and the seventy. They were put upon their own for a time, as our students are during their two summers. Each time they returned better prepared to appreciate the work of the Teacher with them.

Those were glorious years for those first theologs, as those kindred souls enjoyed fellowship one with another and with their Master. They, of course, had their hardships to endure. There were times of friction between themselves. There were times when it seemed that nothing could ever be made of them. One of them even proved to be a complete failure, betrayed his Master, and ended his life as a cowardly suicide.

But finally eleven of that first class of twelve came to the day of graduation. They heard their Teacher give them their Great Commission and send them forth to preach the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the world. They took His work upon themselves, and they went forth to perform it. And each in his own way was faithful to that high calling.

We today are seeking to carry on that same work. We are dedicating ourselves to the training of Preachers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are seeking to make our Seminary as much as possible like that first Seminary. We have the very same Gospel to proclaim as they did. Jesus said that the progress of His Kingdom would be like a tiny seed growing into a mighty plant, like a little yeast leavening the whole lump. And so it has been down through the centuries. It is still growing. The crisis of this time demands that it grow rapidly. God grant that in this Seminary and in other Seminaries all over Christendom heralds of Christ will be trained and sent forth to preach the only Gospel that can save our world!



FINAL DAYS OF ENDOWMENT CAMPAIGN

Columbia Seminary Appeals to Its Friends

At the beginning of 1945, friends of Columbia Seminary in Atlanta offered to give \$50,000 for the endowment of the institution if \$100,000 could be secured from other sources by January 1, 1946. No formal and organized campaign for funds has been undertaken. Nevertheless the challenge of this offer has been widely presented by bulletins, by letters, and by personal interviews, where the latter method has been possible. The response has been highly gratifying. A great many individuals throughout the five supporting synods have already contributed, and many of the gifts received have represented real sacrifice. As of December 18, 1945, approximately \$86,500 in cash has been received by the seminary. There remains the tremendous task of securing \$13,500 more during the last three weeks of the year. Difficult as that task is, it is not impossible.

Five prominent Atlanta laymen have undertaken to assist in raising this amount and are sending an urgent appeal to other Presbyterians over their collective signatures. It is hoped that the response to their appeal will be generous. The Alumni of the seminary are also pressing an appeal for funds within their own ranks. Only by the help of our united constituency will success be possible. Columbia Seminary urgently requests all who read these lines to consider them as a personal appeal for their prayers and their gifts. It is hoped that many will contribute largely. No gift is too small to help. A dollar given to the institution now can be worth three times its normal value to the Church. We *must not* fail in this undertaking. If all of our friends will do what they can, we *will not* fail.